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ABSTRACT

The Staff Development for School Improvement (SDSI) Program uses an innovative and clearly-defined six-step process which focuses on teachers' ability to solve critical professional problems in their buildings. Through this process, teachers are given the responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating their own staff development. The process includes steps involving: (1) establishment of teacher awareness, readiness, and commitment to the program; (2) an interactive needs assessment; (3) preparation of a staff development plan; (4) implementation of the plan; (5) plan monitoring and evaluation; and (6) reassessment of needs. Evaluation of the SDSI programs as implemented in various schools has included consideration of both process and products of the program. Evaluation of the programs have so far indicated that the program is very successful and the six-step process has been perceived as very useful and effective for helping schools plan and implement successful staff development projects. Improved work relationships and staff communication appear to be major outcomes of most projects, administrative support was seen as key to the success of some individual school goals, and academic achievement rates improved when projects made that goal. (CB)

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SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH STAFF DEVELOPMENT: AN EVALUATION MODEL

Association of Teacher Educators National Conference
Houston, February 17, 1987

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Presentation Objectives

1. To describe a collaborative, school-based staff development program involving a university and K-12 school districts.
2. To offer a rationale for the program's evaluation model.
3. To illustrate the components of that evaluation model.
4. To describe the findings of the program evaluation.

Introduction

The Staff Development for School Improvement (SDSI) program has been recognized for offering a highly effective method for implementing staff development efforts in school buildings*. This program provides a school staff with the skills and procedures needed to identify and address their most pressing professional problems. It is based on the premise that classroom teachers can best define their needs for professional development, identify their own priorities, and plan a program to improve their school. The SDSI program at Eastern Michigan University, now in its eighth year, currently works with 22 southeastern Michigan school districts in collaborative efforts to improve schools through staff development.

Annual evaluations of the SDSI program have been directed at testing the unlying principles of school-based staff development projects**. The evaluations have shown that the program is sound and "works as an approach to staff development", and that there are certain factors critical to its effectiveness. Input, process, and outcome evaluations conducted during the past three years have provided significant data for those who might choose to replicate the SDSI model in local school districts.

*(Recognitions received by the SDSI program include an American Association of State Colleges and Universities Exemplary Teacher Education Program Award in 1985, an Association of Teacher Educators Distinguished Teacher Education Program Award in 1986, and an American Association of School Administrators School Improvement Award in 1986.)

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The Program

The Staff Development for School Improvement program originated in 1974 in Michigan's Taylor school district. Eastern Michigan University became involved in 1978 because of a concern that without university participation this unique model for school-based staff development would not be fully validated, and if proven successful would not be adequately disseminated in the state or nation. Eastern Michigan University is recognized as a prominent teacher education institution with strong school, state and national linkages. The EMU/SDSI program has continued to operate since 1978 under the direction of one full-time equated coordinator and as many as eight university faculty annually serving as project facilitators. A unique aspect of the faculty is that they have agreed to serve as process consultants rather than as the traditional content experts. How to function in that capacity has unfolded as the program evolved, with the result that significant new insights have been obtained on how to better utilize university resources for the mutual benefit of schools and the university.

The success of the SDSI program can be attributed mainly to the use of an innovative and clearly defined six-step process which focuses on teachers' ability to solve critical professional problems in their buildings. Through this process teachers are given the responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating their own staff development. Local ownership of the staff development program is the key, and endorsement of the program by both administrators and teachers is essential. Most significant, however, is that the process produces change and improvement--that teachers feel better about what they are doing, and that the school program has improved. The primary interest of the university is for two kinds of outcomes, two kinds of institutionalization: (1) the adoption in the school of an effective staff development process, and (2) the adoption in the school of improvements resulting from staff development. Within the latter is, of course, the expectation that improved student achievement in the schools comes from those staff development efforts.

The essence of the staff development in the SDSI program is constructive change through shared decision making at the school building level. It is based on five critical assumptions:

1. The school building is the largest unit in which effective change can occur.
2. Those charged with implementing change must have an active voice in determining how that change will take place.
3. Ownership of the change process by those participating is essential and is a natural by-product of shared decision making.
4. Such change contributes to an improved learning climate, reflected in the improved instructional performance of students.
5. The six-step process provides a vehicle for that change to occur.

The six-step process for implementing building-based teacher-directed staff development programs in school districts begins by first establishing the awareness, readiness and commitment of teachers for the program. It then moves through an interactive needs assessment, the preparation of a staff development plan, implementation of the plan, a monitoring and evaluation component, and finally the adoption and reassessment of needs step. Programs are provided leadership through a representative committee of school faculty including the principal and the university facilitator.

Themes and goals of projects that evolve from this effort cover a wide range of school needs. However, the focus of the process is staff development for school improvement, not inservice education for individual-professional growth. Its primary emphasis is on developing better programs for students by supporting teachers and administrators in their work to improve curriculums, develop more effective teaching strategies, and create better learning climates. Improving the quality of schooling--the quality of the experiences students have under the auspices of the school and the results of those experiences--is its first consideration.

Background for Program Evaluation

The SDSI program is truly unique in that it draws on personnel resources from throughout the university, and seeks to connect those resources with K-12 schools. It also places the focus of its support on schools, and especially upon the staffs within those schools. The relationship and support that is built is not just a single-shot effort, but one which is created over time. It emphasizes leadership development within teaching staffs, and helps those staffs acquire more effective group problem-solving and decision-making skills--qualities so essential to the effort of updating and upgrading school programs.

Evaluation of the program and how it impacts schools has been a major concern of the SDSI staff at Eastern Michigan University ever since its establishment in 1978. One of the key interests in having the university become involved in SDSI was that it should have the resources to determine whether the approach to staff development SDSI promotes is an effective and appropriate way to pursue school improvement. The university's broad base of operation within a major metropolitan region and its long history of involvement with K-12 school districts, as well as its own need to strengthen the relationship between schools and the university's teacher education programs, provided strong motives for participation in this form of staff development. Its performance in facilitating staff development projects in schools and the ways in which those projects help to improve schools have been the focus of evaluations throughout these years.

Evaluation Procedures and Findings

Evaluations of the SDSI program have been completed for each year of its operation. Early evaluations focused on documenting and monitoring the activities of the various school staff development projects supported by the program, and utilizing that information to judge the effectiveness of the program. Evaluations for 1981-82 and 1982-83 concluded that the program was sound and "works as an approach to staff development." They were, effectively, the first stage in a series of annual evaluations developed around the CIPP model (Context, Input, Process, Product) for program evaluation. Their focus was the context of the program, including what it encompassed and who it involved.

The 1983-84 evaluation was an input evaluation designed to provide information about the appropriateness and relative merits of the six-step process. Through questionnaires, observations, and interviews the evaluation focused on judging the extent to which the six-step process was utilized in the 17 project sites for that year. It addressed issues of whether the strategy is appropriate to the goals and objectives of the SDSI program, whether it is a useful strategy for implementing a staff development program at the building level, and whether the role of the university facilitator is appropriate. That evaluation was designed to provide information primarily for the purpose of accountability, to record the extent of use of the six-step process, and to judge whether its use resulted in the implementation of a staff devleopment program.

The findings of the 1983-84 evaluation provided evidence for the conclusion that the six-step process is working effectively and is a practical mechanism which can lead to effective staff development programs in schools. It also offered evidence that the university facilitator has an important role in some steps of an SDSI project.

The 1984-85 evaluation was primarily a process study which examined the overall SDSI program and the perceived effectiveness of implementation in the schools. That evalution was designed for both the purpose of improvement (to guide decisions about changes in the program) and for the purpose of accountability (to provide a record of the various aspects of the SDSI process). The third purpose was to provide opportunities for project personnel to gain skills in evaluation which would result in sound project evalutions and evidence of the impact of the various projects. Data collection included the use of a 63-item questionnaire completed by staffs in 16 project schools, the use of an organizational norms instrument administered to all first-year projects to assess institutional readiness for staff development, interviews with principals and school leadership teams at selected sites, and interviews with the university facilitators and SDSI program leadership.

The findings from the 1984-85 evaluation support the main conclusion that the SDSI program is very successful. More specifically, it determined that:

1. The six-step process is used as designed and results in the establishment of collaboratively planned staff development projects in participating schools.
2. The six-step process is perceived as both useful and important to the local school staff development effort.
3. The roles of the university and the facilitator are seen as very positive by project personnel. The university's intervention is perceived as a key to the success of staff development projects.
4. Teachers gained new understanding and skills through the staff development programs, and especially report better staff communication and improved collegial relationships resulted from the projects.

Program Evaluation in 1985-86

The 1985-86 evaluation examined both the process and products of the SDSI program. Outcome information regarding variables associated with school improvement and tentative longitudinal information on student achievement gains were addressed in that evaluation. Information obtained through it will aid the university in further refining and modifying the program within its present guidelines and offer further support for the continued involvement of Eastern Michigan University in the SDSI outreach effort. That evaluation used a research-based conceptual framework of school improvement outcomes as the basis for assessing the project sites and evaluating the "success" of the SDSI program. The framework describes a successful project at a building level as the "stable, built-in, widespread use of a well-designed innovation that had a positive impact on students and teachers." (Huberman and Miles, 1984)

There were three components to the 1985-86 evaluation. The first provided information on the implementation of the SDSI process in first-year school sites which would be used in the continual improvement of the SDSI program. The second provided information on the impact of the program on the university facilitator. In the third component the focus was upon examination of selected variables considered to be indicators of school improvement practices. The first two components will be discussed very briefly below, while greater elaboration is offered for component three, as it seems to be the most important of the three when dealing with program outcomes in the evaluation process.

Data for the first component was gathered using a short questionnaire administered in new project schools. The findings indicated that the six-step process used for SDSI projects is a reliable and effective procedure for establishing staff development programs in local schools.

For the second component seven university facilitators responded to a questionnaire concerning their role as facilitators. Their responses made it clear that the role of facilitator has impacted in a number of positive ways the faculty serving in that capacity. Even though there were some differences in role perception, the majority of

facilitators spoke very favorably of the program and how it has contributed to their own professional growth.

In a survey of literature for the third component of this evaluation, it was determined that the recent work by Huberman and Miles (1984), Joyce, Hersh & McKibbin (1983) and Little (1982) provides useful and compatible conceptions of the conditions that emerge in a school as the result of an intentional and successful school improvement/staff development effort. Essentially, these conceptions allow us to describe the results or impact of the SDSI effort in terms of specific characteristics of the schools which exist following the completion of the staff development project or a project in its final stages.

For evaluative purposes the research "treatment" in this evaluation was the six-step process and related SDSI activities. The "product" was the staff development project implemented in a school and the organizational and personal effects stemming from the projects. In other words, the collaborative effort between Eastern Michigan University and an individual building staff involves a process by which an innovation of some type is introduced and adopted by a school. A successful outcome can then be identified as the degree to which the innovation is stabilized in the school setting and the degree to which the process itself becomes part of the normative, ongoing structure of the school. Defining the concept of School Improvement in these terms is consistent with Joyce, Hersh & McKibbin's (1983) second stage of school improvement (Renovating the School) and with the conceptual scheme proposed by Huberman and Miles (1984).

The conceptual scheme developed by Huberman and Miles (1984) to judge the process of school improvement posited a dynamic model of the process of implementing an innovation. A school that adopts an innovative program does so in the context of a community as well as higher levels of school organization. The adopting school is provided some kind of assistance tied to the program and the school assimilates the innovation as a function of past history factors, organizational factors, and factors associated with the teachers and staff. The innovation itself, the school organization, and the staff are transformed to some extent as the innovation is adopted and becomes part of the school. All of these variables are grouped into either antededent or mediating variables which were comparable across all of the sites studied by Huberman and Miles (1984).

The third component of the 1985-86 evaluation recognized that the transformations on the organizational and staff variables result in a set of distinct outcomes. It dealt most directly with program outcomes, and provides the more significant data for review. Seven variables that are considered characteristic outcomes of school efforts were studied in five school buildings. Those variables focused upon the implementation of an innovation within a school as a result of the SDSI project conducted in that building. Those variables were studied in terms of:

1. Stabilization of Use.
2. Percentage of Use.
3. Institutionalization.
4. Student Impact.
5. User Capacity Change.
6. Job Mobility.
7. Work Relationships.

The first three of these outcomes focused on whether the innovation (something in the school resulting from a staff development project) was stable, widely used, and "built in." The second three focus on what the innovation did for people--the impact. Huberman and Miles (1984) studied the extent to which these six variables or conditions existed in school improvement sites. They found that high or moderately high outcomes were obtained in sites where the school improvement process was considered successful.

The extent to which these seven outcome conditions exist in sites which have completed--or are in their final year of--the SDSI sponsored staff development program was studied and assessed in this component of the evaluation. The focus was upon judging the merit and worth of the SDSI program as defined by these outcomes variables. No attempt was made to asess the quality of the innovation in the school sites or to assess the antecedent and mediating conditions leading to these outcomes.

Five sites were chosen which met the selection criteria. Teams of two university SDSI facilitators and the project evaluators visited each of the five sites using an extensive open-ended interview schedule in order to collect as varied and in-depth information as possible from site staff.

Although there was some variance in the outcomes among the sites, the extent to which the outcomes have been achieved was sufficient to conclude that all of the site projects are at least moderately successful. Five of the outcome indicators were sufficiently sensitive to allow judgements to be made about the success of the programs. The job mobility indicator did not lead to information that was very useful or meaningful. Also, no conclusions can be drawn from the student outcome data (analysis of Michigan Educational Assessment Program scores). The patterns of test scores by schools were varied and did not lead to meaningful interpretations.

Major Conclusions

The interpretation of findings from evaluations of the SDSI program--with particular emphasis upon the 1985-86 assessment--has led to the primary conclusion that the SDSI program is very successful; the expected outcomes have been achieved and the university's role in staff development is well established and respected. Important specific findings include the following:

1. When school-based projects have academic achievement as one of their project objectives, observable improvement in academic skills results.
2. Administrative support is very important in the success of those variables dealing with changes in the school organization--stabilization of use, percentage of use, and institutionalization.
3. Improved work relationships and improved staff communication appear to be primary outcomes of projects focused on curriculum and instructional improvement. Improvement in these areas is the over-riding positive finding in the evaluation, although in every case it can be considered a side effect to the primary project goal.

The six-step process has been consistently viewed as a useful and effective mechanism by which schools can plan and implement effective staff development projects. The role of the university facilitator also is perceived as important to the success of the staff development effort, while the facilitator experience has had important impacts on the university faculty member and the university.

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**Annual SDSI evaluations since 1981 have been conducted by outside evaluators with the cooperation of SDSI program staff, facilitators and participating project schools. Those evaluators were:

1981-82, 1982-83: Roy Edelfelt
1983-84, 1984-85: Ronald Crowell
1985-86, Ronald Crowell and Paula Tissott

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